

HISTORY OF THE BARE HILL COPPER MINES

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

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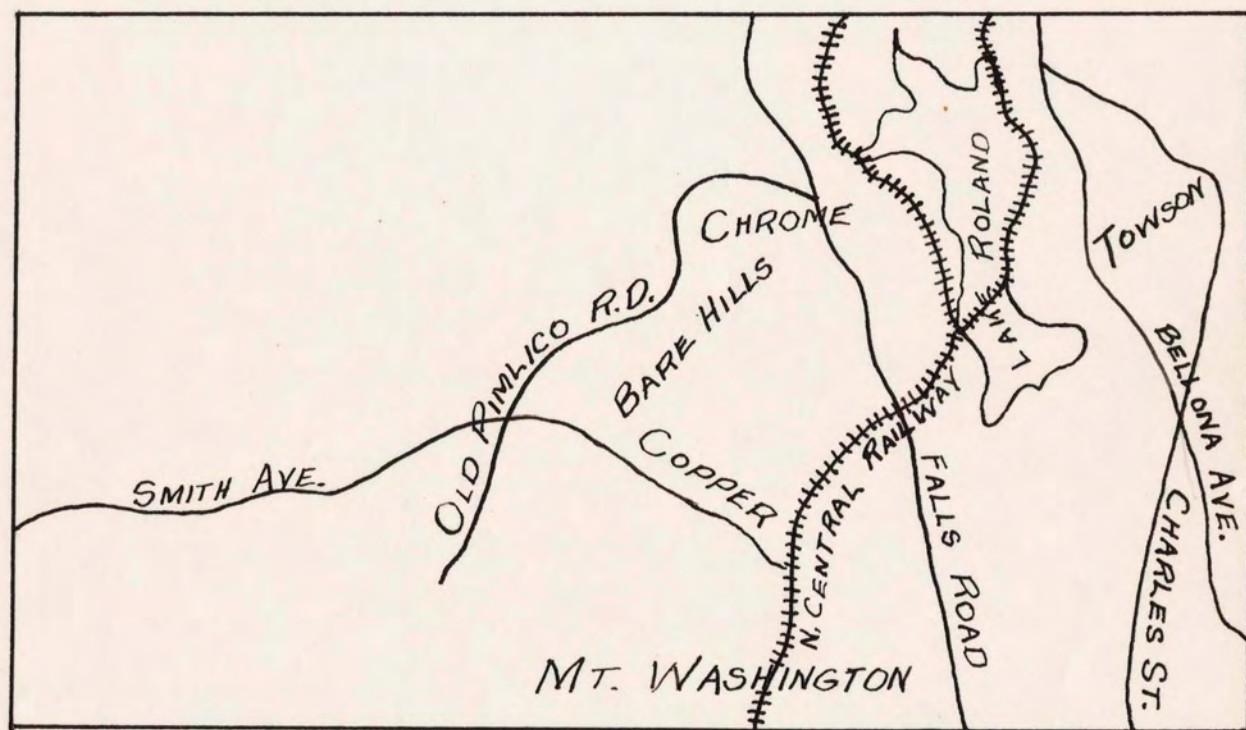
SUMMARY

Though it is little known, there was once a thriving copper mine in the State of Maryland, The Bare Hill Copper Mines. It was located at what is now called Mt. Washington, on the outskirts of Baltimore City. There was a great deal of difficulty encountered in putting the mine on a profitable basis when it was first discovered. The trouble arose when the original owner was inveigled into an unfair agreement with a mining engineer.

One began to hear of the Bare Hill Copper Mines when it was purchased by Mr. Keener who incorporated a company of the same name.

During the foremost existing years of the Bare Hill Copper Mining Company production rose steadily, and the profits were fairly large considering the times. As time progressed, the company was hampered not only by undesirable conditions such as floods and fires, but by the accumulation of dishonest company leaders. These circumstances brought about the permanent closing of the mine. The land including the mines and surroundings was mortgaged and finally sold. Its present owner being a resident of Washington D. C. To date, the land is for sale being in the hands of a Baltimore Real Estate concern.

If perchance one were to pass by the present copper mine at Bare Hills, he would hardly recognize the place as a former copper mine.



LOCATION OF THE BARE HILLS COPPER MINES

HISTORY OF THE BARE HILLS COPPER MINES--BALTIMORE

The Bare Hills are now located less than a mile from Baltimore City, near the suburban section known as Mt. Washington. That portion of the Hills where the chrome mining operations were carried on is near Falls Road, while the copper mine is on Smith Avenue. Old Pimlico Road connects Falls Road and Smith Avenue. As Baltimore City increased in size, Bare Hills, quite naturally became closer. In the 60's the Hills were seven miles from the city.

Copper was discovered at Bare Hills in 1844 when Smith Avenue was a mere dirt road. Sometime prior to 1844, copper had been discovered on the farm of Thomas B. Watts, who desired that the deposits should be explored and worked. He, having little money and knowing nothing about mining, entered into an agreement with Thomas Petherick, a mining engineer, for the exploration of the copper on the farm. In the agreement Watts received one dollar consideration and a promise of a full fifteenth part of all minerals after the same had rendered fit for smelting, clear of all expenses. Petherick paid Watts to make an excavation to the small shaft previously sunk on the farm.

In December, 1844 Petherick transferred his interest to Isaac Tyson Jr. This gentleman attempted to hold Watts to his agreement, but Watts, being advised that he had made an unequal contract, treated it as null. Tyson brought suit. The case was argued by some of the most noted lawyers of the time--Reverdy Johnson and J. H. B. Latrobe for Tyson, and T. Parkin Scott for

Watts. The Court decided that the agreement was one-sided. Tyson could, under the agreement, use the mine if it were found productive, but if found otherwise, he could just lag along, doing nothing, and all the time depriving Watts of revenue which he might be able to get from somebody else who knew better how to work it, or by using the property for other purposes. Therefore, the contract was not mutual.

Tyson, according to history, was a loiterer. Others also endeavored to mine the copper there. However, the operation between 1845-1855 were carried on none too successfully, although the shaft was dug to a depth of 350 feet. The drawing of water, always a great question at the Bare Hills copper mine, and the hoisting of the ore and rubbish were done by means of a small steam engine. The water was drawn up in buckets through a small irregular shaft which struck the vein at the depth of 140 feet.

In 1855, Dr. William H. Keener acquired a small interest in the mine, and in 1858 he purchased a controlling interest. Captain Edward Powers, his superintendent, abandoned the combined use of shaft and slope. He widened the slope and extended it to the surface.

In 1860 the Bare Hills Copper Mining Company was incorporated by Act of the General Assembly of Maryland. Later, in 1864, the company was reorganized with Keener as president, and work commenced on a greater scale. Up to 1864 the shaft, which was not vertical but on an incline of forty-five degrees, had been dug to a depth of 590 feet. The new system of pumping and hoisting was carried out by a steam engine cylinder with two boilers, 25 feet long and

3½ feet in diameter. An ore crusher was attached to the engine with a pair of rollers 18 inches in diameter and 14 inches in length. Three jigger machines of the oblong type were used for sifting. Other improvements were made, such as a suitable dressing house for ore, an office, a smith's shop, and a carpenter's shop, a dwelling for the superintendent, and four blocks of miners' houses.

In 1864 the mining company had a capital stock of \$500,000 in 100,000 shares. All was apparently subscribed to at the time or within a short period, for two dividends on the total capital were declared before 1866, but the working capital was not absorbed at the outset. Furthermore, \$25,000 was loaned on good security. Keener, before 1864, had explored the levels and exposed to easy access, enough ore so that it was not necessary to spend a great deal in sinking the shaft.

During the first two months of the new company's operation, over 175 tons of ore were mined. Only twelve miners were working at the time.

From March, 1864 to March, 1865, 700 tons were taken from the mine, and the shaft was dug approximately 50 feet deeper to a 650 feet level.

During the month of May, 1864, alone, 80 tons of ore were brought to the surface by 25 miners, and in June, 1864, forty hands were engaged at the mine. Thereafter, until 1867, the average was twenty-five men, nine for exploration and sixteen to work the ore.

A résumé of the period 1863-65 shows: In 1863, 432 tons of which 2,352 pounds, of copper were mined with a value of \$21,558. In 1864, 700 tons, value about \$54,300. In 1865 about 75 tons a month. In June, 1864, a dividend was declared of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  per cent, \$12,500, on the capital stock of \$500,000, and in December, another at 4 per cent, or \$20,000.

Weed in "Copper Deposits of the United States" writes that Dr. Lehmann, once chemist at the Baltimore Copper Works, reported yearly shipments prior to 1864, as varying between 2,000-2,500 tons of 15-20 per cent ore. Inasmuch as the records of the Baltimore Copper Works were destroyed by fire, his figures mostly from memory, are not so accurate as the ones given by the copper mining company itself.

No records are available for years of 1865-1868. In July of 1868, a great cloudburst and flood at Baltimore occurred. The mine was damaged and flooded and work stopped for sometime.

The water was pumped out, and the mines functioned intermittently from 1867 to 1887. The shaft during this period reached 900 feet in depth inclining under Smith Avenue. For the ten year period 1866-77, the annual output was from 800 to 1,200 tons of cobbed ore, averaging 18 per cent copper, with 1,000-1,500 tons of hatched ore or concentrates. From 1866 to 1887 the shipments gradually lessened, averaging about 50 tons a month of 18 per cent cobbed ore. At that time copper was worth a price of about fifteen cents a pound. The gross valuation from 1864 to 1887 was then about \$1,750,000 for 32,500 tons of 18 per cent material.

In 1880, according to the Tenth Census report, the mine yielded 17 tons of concentrates from which 1,275 pounds of copper were produced. The mine was undoubtedly dying. Works stopped temporarily.

In the late 90's the mine was operated again. A number of Mt. Washington residents became stockholders in an unsuccessful company. Very little was done. The fact that the company exchanged stocks for provisions at the general store, for the services of a mason who erected foundations, and for other material shows that it was in weak financial condition. According to the stockholders and one former director who were interviewed, there were some honest officers in the company and there were some dishonest ones. In any event, the stockholders lost their money.

During this last venture, new machinery an air compressor, and other equipment were set up. One nearly resident stated that after all the money was gone, coal, which kept the steam engine going on which the pumps depended-could not be purchased. The mine filled up with water again.

After this last disastrous enterprise during which the property was mortgaged and sold, it came into the hands of the present owner, Mrs. Elizabeth Hill, 716 E. 21 St. N. W., a resedent of Washington D. C. Mrs. Hill has the land in the hands of a real estate agent, M. Goldseker, of Balto. Md. Mrs. Hill's land that is for sale, not only included the mines themselves but also the surroundings.

I tried to gain the acquaintances of some of the miners still living in the vicinity but my efforts were not rewarded. From what I observed from the people and their surroundings, I could, in a way, understand their attitude. They were not very friendly and education seemed to be sadly neglected. Living conditions did not seem up to par and houses were overcrowded in some cases. I explained to them the object of my visit, but my three years of public speaking aided me none. By a stroke of luck, I did make an acquaintance, but the introduction was carried on between the pages of one of the books from which I was gathering material. Mr. Doheny informed me of some of the high lights of the Copper Mining Company in those days.

The period of greatest prosperity was apparently in the 1860's. In those days, however, wages were not high. The miners received about \$1.50 a day, the surface men \$1.25, and the boys \$.50. The surface men and the boys worked in one shift, ten hours of daylight, the miners worked in three shifts, eight hours each. The miners used candles, either stuck in clay on their stiff hats or placed on a rock.

The ore was mined by means of hammer and black blasting powder. Later the air drill came into use, a method by which air was pumped down a pipe to the apparatus. Dynamite was not used in the earlier days, it was hardly known. Instead, they used blasting powder which was put in a hole with a fuse. If the hole was wet, they made a paper cartridge.

A wooden cart with a iron frame was pulled up a three foot gauge track by a cable on a dram, run by the engine. It took from

four to five minutes for a load to reach the top.

After the ore arrived at the surface, the solid pieces of copper were removed, the scrap was thrown away, and the remainder crushed, after which it was given to the boys to sift. Next, the copper concentrates were put in a trough and washed by water which was pumped up from the mine and dammed up.

The ore, in the earlier period, was taken by horse and wagon through a natural cut in the hills to Bare Hills Station, where a copper house and a siding were located on the Northern Central Railway. The copper sent to the copper house near the siding was transported to Canton, Baltimore. At a later date the ore was taken down Smith Avenue to the Mt. Washington Station, instead of by the old route.

Most of the miners lived around Bare Hills. Six or seven of the old miners' houses are still in existence and occupied. The old mining company office is now used as a dwelling. Some of the miners who worked as boys are still living in the vicinity. No laws had been passed in the third quarter of the last century in regards to child labor. Mr. Doheny, who was eleven years of age when he worked at the mine, says that there were at least ten other boys between the ages of twelve and eighteen working there at the same time. He was the youngest. Most of the boys had stopped school in the fifth or sixth grades. He says that the boys were fired daily for various pranks by old Captain Cooper, and then as they started to leave, were called back again. The captain, he added, was superstitious about whistling in or near the mines believing accidents would follow. No serious injuries or deaths

are on record. He also stated that most of the miners were Irish and as for amusements whiskey was one of the few.

The foundation where the air compressor rested, a main shaft now practically filled in, a water filled shaft that led to the main shaft, the old office, and a few houses in which the miners lived, besides the hills of dead materials, are about all that are left on the surface to show what was once a busy mine.

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MAIN SHAFT OF BARE HILL COPPER MINES THAT  
IS NOW BEING FILLED IN.



OLD FOUNDATION FOR THE VARIOUS ENGINES  
EMPLOYED TO BRING THE ORE CART TO THE  
SURFACE.



VIEWS SHOWING HILLS OF WASTE MATTER



SHAFT PARTIALLY FILLED BY WATER AND LAND  
MATTER LEADS TO MAIN SHAFT. USED TO  
REMOVE WATER FROM MINE.